

Common Themes of AVALANCHE ACCIDENTS

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■ After reviewing 20 + years of avalanche accidents, some common themes are evident.

■ These threads to accidents include:

*** Failure to recognize changing snowpack and/or weather conditions—**

be aware of increasing winds, temperatures and/or precipitation

- With time
- With elevation
- With aspect

*** Failure to heed warnings of instability**

- Always heed bull's eye information like recent slide releases, cracking or whomping snow

*** Failure to correctly utilize weather information**

- Not updating

- Not being aware of changes—time and space

*** Incorrect assessment of tracks with stability** (ski / snowboard / snowshoe / snowmobile)

- Previous tracks do not mean stability

*** Failure to assess potential for multiple slide releases** (from different parts of a bowl or release zone)

*** Small slides & Terrain traps** (in avalanche terrain, focus is too often on the BIG bowls and slopes, when statistics show that smaller gullies, cliffs, rocks, trees, etc are more likely to catch unwary travelers)

- Always consider terrain both above **and** below
- What are the consequences of being caught by even a small slide??

Common Human Factors

*** Attitude**

- Ego (pride, greed)
- Overconfidence

- Stress
- Conflict
- Impatience
- Euphoria

*** Physical**

- Fatigue, cold, wet
- Schedules
- Equipment
- Injury
- "Gizmo" reliance

*** Group**

- Poor planning
- Poor route selection (for the conditions)
- Poor communication (no or limited discussion among party members)
- Unrealistic time management
- Tunnel vision (e.g., the ridge or summit at any cost)
- *Herding* instinct & *Lemming* behavior (safety in numbers and following without thinking)
- *Horse or Back to the Barn* syndrome

➤ Using the *Wrong Eyeballs* (Flatland versus Avalanche Eyeballs—in the mountains you need to think like the snow pack in order to maximize safety)

* **Good weather** (such great snow and weather, nothing bad can happen today)

* **Familiarity** or negative (positive) reinforcement (this slope has never slid before)

* **Lack of applying knowledge**

➤ Just because it's there doesn't mean it will be applied; make sure avalanche skills keep pace with sporting skills (skiing / boarding / riding etc. skills)

* **Incorrect assessment of risk** (not recognizing steep slope angle, poor stability, etc)—It won't be that bad!

* **Failure to change or modify plans or routes** (due to weather or snowpack)

* **Being extreme in extreme conditions**

* **Lack of knowing or recognizing your limit**

➤ **Hormonally challenged! (Testosterone Challenged)**